

Letterman General Hospital, Nurses' Quarters
(Thompson Hall, Bldgs. Nos. 1020-1022-1024-1026)
Girard Rd. and Lincoln Blvd. (north corner)
Presidio of San Francisco
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS No. CA-2269

HABS
CAL,
38-SANFRA,
169-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HABS
CAL,
38-SANFRA,
169-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LETTERMAN GENERAL HOSPITAL, NURSES' QUARTERS HABS No. CA-2269
(Thompson Hall, Building Nos. 1020-1022-1024-1026)

Location: Girard Road and Lincoln Boulevard (north corner)
Presidio of San Francisco
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

U.S.G.S. San Francisco North Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
10.548200.4183650

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Army
Presidio of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA 94129

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Present Use: Vacant (scheduled to be demolished October 1987)

Significance: The Nurses' Quarters is significant as one of the few remaining buildings of the historic Letterman General Hospital complex at the Presidio of San Francisco. The hospital, permanently established in 1899, was the first Army general hospital in the U.S., and underwent rapid facilities expansion between 1899-1902 and during World War I. By World War II, the medical complex had become the second largest military hospital in the U.S.

The Nurses' Quarters, which also incorporated a kitchen and dining room, served as home to army nurses attending to base soldiers and those returning from the first and second World Wars, the Korean War, as well as California Conservation Corps members during the Depression, and civilian citizens of San Francisco.

The Nurses' Quarters, designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, were unified visually with the central quadrangle of the Letterman General Hospital complex by their stucco cladding, red tiled roofs, and ornamental porch grillework. Historic photographs, building plans, and records indicate that the earliest (1914) section of the dormitory was building 1020, facing southwest on Lincoln Boulevard. Constructed in six phases between 1914 and 1941, the growth of the Nurses' Quarters reflected that of the hospital and the Presidio, and in a larger sense, paralleled American foreign involvements during the twentieth century.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** The present configuration of Nurses' Quarters were constructed in four stages. Building 1020, the main building, was completed 20 May 1914. Addition "A", now building 1022, was completed 24 August 1915. Addition "B", building 1024, was constructed by 28 July 1916. Addition "C", building 1026 was completed 19 February 1930.

2. **Architect, Builder:** The architects and builders are unrecorded for most of the building stages. Drawings and plans dated May 1929 for the construction of addition "C" were produced by the Constructing Quartermaster's Office at the Presidio. These buildings are similar in style to the adjacent Letterman General Hospital complex (original buildings) which were designed by W.H. Wilcox of San Francisco.

3. **Original plans and construction:** The "Building Book", now in the collections of the Presidio Army Museum, records costs of construction as follows: building 1020: \$21,136.90; building 1022: \$18,618.00; building 1024: \$18,653.00; and building 1026 (incorporating a one-story dining room addition along the northwest side of 1024): \$52,697.92. An early photograph reproduced in the special 1919 issue, "The History of Letterman General Hospital," of the *Listening Post* shows that the second story of the porch on the southwest elevation of building 1020 originally had a full width, screened-in porch with grillework railings. The center three bays of the porch were enclosed with paired, double-hung windows in 1929-30.

4. **Alterations and additions:** The three major additions ("A"/1022, "B"/1024, and "C"/1026) to building 1020 are described above, and were recorded in the "Building Book" and by architectural plans, copies of which accompany this report. In 1916, a covered walkway bridge was erected to lead from the first floor of Building 1022 over Girard Road to Ward A; evidently this was demolished in 1975. A one-story structure, addition "D," also stuccoed, was erected to the northwest of building 1020 in 1931 as a nurses' recreation room, and was connected to the dormitory by a covered walkway. In 1941, two further additions were made to the northeast end of the building, comprising additions "E" and "F", buildings 1028 and 1030. "E" and "F" each had five floors and were similar in plan to the existing dormitories. These additions were demolished in 1975 when most of the other original Letterman General Hospital buildings were demolished.

LETTERMAN GENERAL HOSPITAL, NURSES' QUARTERS
(Thompson Hall, Building Nos. 1020-1022-1024-1026)
PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO
HABS No. CA-2269 (Page 3)

On the interior, major alterations include the reworking of nurses' rooms on the first floor of building 1020 in 1929-30 to enlarge the reception room; a wood burning fireplace on the northeast wall was added at this time. In 1936-37, the replacement of floors in 94 rooms and hallways with oak strip flooring, replacement of plumbing pipes and fittings, and upgrading of a call buzzer system were part of a W.P.A.-sponsored project of improvements at the Presidio. Throughout the building most of the individual nurses' rooms have been combined with an adjacent nurses' room to form two-room apartments.

B. Historical Context

Formally designated as a United States military reservation in 1850, the Presidio of San Francisco witnessed major building growth during and following the Civil War. Involvement of the United States in the Spanish-American War in the Pacific brought further growth at the Presidio, including the establishment in 1899 of a permanent military hospital to handle returning wounded troops from the war in the Philippines. This, the first Army general hospital in the U. S., was designed as a quadrangle, bounded by Girard Road, Lincoln Boulevard, General Kennedy Avenue and Edie Avenue. In 1911, the hospital was named after Major Jonathan Letterman, a highly-regarded army doctor. Additional medical facilities were constructed through the end of World War I, during which the hospital specialized as an orthopedic center for the treatment of amputee cases. By about 1940, Letterman General Hospital was regarded as the second largest military hospital in the U.S.

The first section of the Nurses' Quarters (building 1020) was constructed in 1914; subsequent additions in 1915 and 1916 doubled and tripled the size of the original building, bringing the capacity to 89 nurses. These building stages reflect the continuing growth of the hospital complex through the end of World War I and the role of the nurses in it; an Army School of Nursing was commissioned at Letterman in 1918. Further additions to the Nurses' Quarters in 1931 and 1941 increased sixfold the size of the original structure, boosting the capacity to 158 nurses and 12 attendants. The intensity of use at the hospital reached a climax during World War II, when the Presidio served as a debarkation point for returning casualties and injured from the war in the Pacific. The function of the Nurses' Quarters was changed around 1970 to that of a base guesthouse following the nurses' relocation to the new Letterman Hospital.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. **Architectural character:** The Nurses' Quarters is architecturally significant as an early (1914) version of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, which harmonized with the rest of the historic Letterman General Hospital complex. Later additions to the original structure repeated the stylistic elements of stucco exterior, Spanish tiled roof, and shaped rafter tails.

2. **Condition of fabric:** Good (to be demolished October 1987)

B. Description of Exterior

1. **Overall dimensions:** Building 1020 measures 80' across and 31' deep, contains two stories over a raised basement, and has a central wing, or hyphen, to the north with dimensions of 18'6" X 21'. Building 1022, with the same number of stories, has identical dimensions in its main section, with a 21' X 21'6" hyphen on the north. Building 1024 contains basement and partial sub-basement levels below two upper stories; its dimensions are approximately 114' X 31'; a hyphen containing an arch over a driveway measures 31'4" X 33'8". Building 1026 has dimensions of 80'4" X 31'4".

2. **Foundations:** Reinforced concrete.

3. **Walls:** Reinforced concrete, stucco cladding.

4. **Structural system:** Reinforced concrete exterior walls, with reinforced concrete interior walls and concrete floor in the basement. Wood floor joists and frame interior partition walls on upper floors. Wood roof structure.

5. **Porches, etc.:** A two-story gallery, five bays across, is located on the southwest elevation of building 1020, and contains the primary entrance to the structure. It has a flat roof with a small overhanging eave covered in red Spanish tile. It features wood-frame, classically-derived clathri pattern railing grilles. The three central bays of the upper story have been enclosed and have had pairs of double-hung windows installed.

6. **Chimneys:** A number of galvanized iron vents are located along the ridge of the rooflines; a stucco covered brick chimney was added to the northeast wall of building 1020 in 1929-30.

7. Openings

a. **Doorways and doors:** The central entry on the southwest elevation is a double door of recent construction, below a four-light transom. Similarly transomed, double doors are located on the southeast elevation of building 1022.

b. **Windows:** Most windows are one-over-one, double-hung, wood sash, with wood frames. Basement windows in building 1020 are single sash tilt-in type. Sills and lintels are cast integrally with the reinforced concrete walls.

8. Roof

a. **Shape, covering:** The four main blocks of the building feature hip roofs, while the hyphens, or connecting wings, exhibit gable roofs with the ridge oriented northeast-southwest. All roof surfaces are clad in red Spanish tile.

b. **Eaves:** The eaves feature wood rafter tails of decorative, S-curve profile.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans

a. **Basement:** A corridor extends lengthwise through the building in a north-south orientation, and is intersected by a single short corridor running crosswise in each building. Paneled wood doors line the corridors, giving access to small storage rooms. A large dining room and kitchen are located on this level on the northwest side of building 1024.

b. **First floor:** The corridors here have the same orientation as on the basement level. A reception room is located in the southeast corner of Building 1020, and the stairway is located directly to the north of this room. The halls are lined with doors giving access to the small dormitory cubicles. A second stairway is located on the west side of the corridor in the hyphen to the north of building 1022.

c. **Second Floor:** The plan of upper dormitory floor is generally the same as on the first floor. A sitting room is located on the second floor at the southwest end of building 1020, partially filling the original second-story porch.

2. **Stairways:** Stairs have wood framing and detailed wood newel posts.

3. **Flooring:** Floors are surfaced in oak strip hardwood supported by wood joists; most of the floor surface is carpeted.

4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Wood frame construction walls and ceilings exhibit smooth, painted plaster surfaces, with wood baseboards and picture mold-

ings. Basement level walls have unfinished concrete surfaces; the ceiling is open to wood joists above.

5. Openings

a. **Doorways:** Paneled wood doors leading to dormitory rooms generally are intact. Transomed double doors in the lengthwise corridors have been replaced with solid core fire doors. Door surrounds have wood moldings.

b. **Windows:** Double-hung windows have interior surrounds of simple wood moldings.

6. **Decorative features:** A simple fireplace with a wood mantle and surrounds of tan brick is located on the northeast wall of the first-floor sitting room in Building 1020. The fireplace was added in 1929-30.

7. **Hardware:** Building hardware is utilitarian.

8. Mechanical Equipment

a. **Heating, ventilation:** Steam heat is provided by a central (off-site) heat plant, cast-iron radiators are located in each room. There is no forced air ventilation or central air conditioning.

b. **Lighting:** Lighting fixtures are ca. 1960 fluorescent type units. Three simple metal chandeliers in the second-floor sitting room of building 1020 may be original to the building.

c. **Plumbing:** Each dormitory room has a porcelain washbasin, served by two large hot water heaters in the sub-basement underneath building 1024.

D. Site

1. **General setting and orientation:** The primary (southwest) facade of the Nurses' Quarters features a two-story gallery porch to take advantage of the southern exposure. The site slopes gently down to the northeast, allowing for the incorporation of four stories (two stories over a basement and a sub-basement) in buildings 1024 and 1026. The structure is to the immediate northwest of the historic Letterman General Hospital quadrangle, and was connected to Ward A of the complex via a tile roofed bridge spanning Girard Road (the ward building and bridge were demolished in 1975). With its stuccoed exterior, Spanish tiled roof, and classically-derived grillework the Nurses' Quarters would have appeared visually unified with the hospital complex. An irregular planting of shrubs and trees along the northwest elevation of the building, still extant, would have shielded the occupants from the noise of railroad shipments to the Quartermaster storehouses which were located immediately to the northwest.

2. **Historic landscape design:** At present, the Nurses' Quarters is surrounded by open space created by the demolition of the surrounding hospital build-

ings in 1975; decorative plantings do not exist. Early period photographs show that the southwest elevation (1914) of the structure was symmetrically framed by two large palm trees; the first floor of the porch also featured planter boxes with flowers. A retaining wall surmounted by rubblestone piers extends along Lincoln Boulevard to the west of the Nurses' Quarters.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings

Architectural drawings for building 1020 (the original 1914 structure) have not been located. Drawings of building 1022, dated 1914, and of buildings 1024 and 1026, dated 1929, are located at the Directorate of Facilities Engineering, HQ Presidio of San Francisco, California 94129.

B. Early Views

Presidio Army Museum Archives, aerial photograph files of Letterman General Hospital.

D. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources

Presidio Army Museum, San Francisco, "Building Book: Letterman General Hospital."

Mudgett, Lt Col Louis E, MSC, "A Brief History of Letterman Army Hospital," (unpublished paper, 28 December 1957), Presidio Army Museum, San Francisco.

"Section 106 Documentation Report: Barracks Projects Presidio of San Francisco, Ca.," (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District, February 1987).

2. Secondary and published sources

Brack, Mark L. and Delgado, James P., *Presidio of San Francisco National Historic Landmark District: Historic American Buildings Survey Report* (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1985)

Chappell, Gordon S., ed., *The Presidio of San Francisco, 1776-1976: A Collection of Historical Source Materials* (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1976)

Final Environmental Impact Statement: Proposed Barracks Numbers 098, 119, and 124, Presidio of San Francisco, California (U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District, 1987)

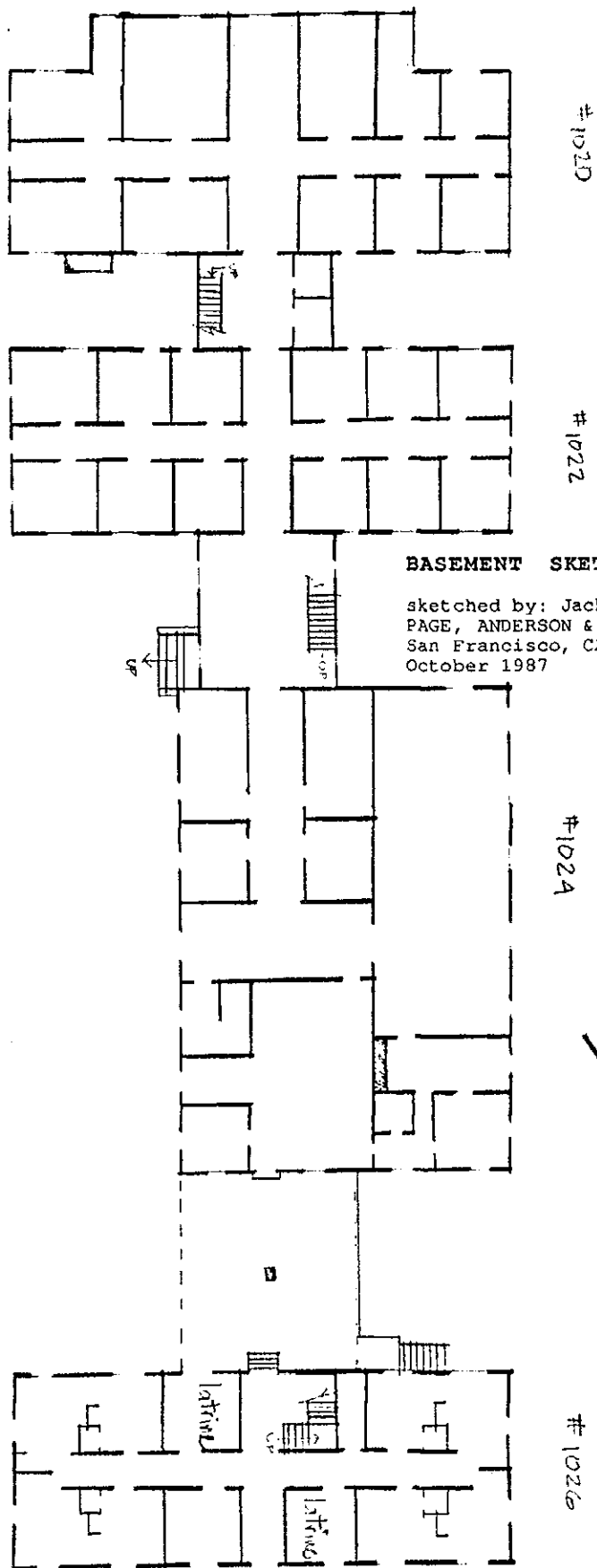
"The History of Letterman General Hospital," *Listening Post* (1919), copy at Presidio Army Museum Archives, San Francisco

LETTERMAN GENERAL HOSPITAL, NURSES' QUARTERS
(Thompson Hall, Building Nos. 1020-1022-1024-1026)
PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO
HABS No. CA-2269 (Page 8)

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This Historic American Buildings Survey documentation of the Letterman General Hospital, Nurses' Quarters was undertaken in compliance with a Memorandum of Agreement among the U.S. Army, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The contract work for the project was performed by Page, Anderson & Turnbull, Inc., 364 Bush Street, San Francisco, Ca 94104; project manager was Jack Schafer.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Krase
Title: Architectural Historian
Affiliation: Page, Anderson & Turnbull, Inc.
Date: 5 October 1987



7 8 9 10 11 12



